



Popular Opinion Leader (POL): A Community AIDS/HIV Risk Reduction Program for Gay Men

The Research

The Science Behind the Package

Popular Opinion Leader (POL) is an intervention based on a program that identifies, trains, and enlists the help of key opinion leaders to change risky sexual norms and behaviors in the gay community. The program is based on diffusion of innovation/social influence principles, which states that trends and innovations are often initiated by a relatively small segment of opinion leaders in the population. Once innovations are visibly modeled and accepted, they then diffuse throughout a population, influencing others.

Target Population

Men who frequent gay bars

Intervention

A cadre of trusted, well-liked men who frequent gay bars are trained to endorse safer sexual behaviors in casual, one-on-one conversations with peers at the bars and other settings. During these conversations, the “popular opinion leader” corrects misperceptions, discusses the importance of HIV prevention, describes strategies he uses to reduce his own risk (e.g., keeping condoms nearby, avoiding sex when intoxicated, resisting coercion for unsafe sex), and recommends that the peer adopt safer sex behaviors. Popular opinion leaders wear buttons displaying the project logo, which also is on posters around the bars, as a conversation-starting technique. Each leader agrees to have at least 14 such conversations and to recruit another popular opinion leader.

Research Results

The POL intervention produced the following results among patrons of bars where the program was conducted:

- Unprotected anal intercourse decreased from between 15 to 29 percent
- Condom use increased
- Numbers of sex partners decreased

For Details on the Research Design

Kelly, J.A., St. Lawrence, J.S., Stevenson, Y., Hauth, A.C., Kalichman, S.C., Diaz, Y.E., Brasfield, T.L., Koob, J.J., and Morgan, M. G. (1992). Community AIDS/HIV risk reduction: The effects of endorsements by popular people in three cities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 82 (11), 1483-1489.



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The Intervention

A Package Developed from Science

Replicating Effective Programs (REP) is a CDC-initiated project that identifies HIV/AIDS prevention interventions with demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. REP supports the original researchers in developing a user-friendly package of materials designed for prevention providers. POL is one of the REP interventions. The POL intervention package is the product of extensive collaboration between HIV prevention researchers who originally developed and evaluated the intervention and AIDS service organizations who implemented the intervention.

Core Elements

Core elements are intervention components that must be maintained without alteration to ensure program effectiveness. The core elements of POL include:

- Identifying and enlisting the support of popular and well-liked opinion leaders to take on risk-reduction advocacy roles
- Training cadres of opinion leaders to disseminate risk-reduction endorsement messages within their own social networks
- Supporting and reinforcing successive waves of opinion leaders to help reshape social norms to encourage safer sex

Package Contents

- Intervention manual that guides organizations through planning, implementation, maintenance, and program evaluation
- Video that provides instruction in POL intervention techniques
- Copies and samples of training materials

Intervention Orientation

Two program staff attend a 2-day training in which they learn how to conduct the intervention, practice intervention delivery skills, and identify agency-specific implementation strategies.

Technical Assistance

Capacity-building assistance providers problem-solve with adopting agencies to achieve an effective balance between maintaining core elements and tailoring to local needs. Assistance providers address implementation concerns, answer questions, and provide advice.

Timeline for Availability

The package is available from CDC along with training on program implementation and technical assistance.

For More Information on the POL Package

For information on trainings, or to place your name on a list for a future training, please contact Stephen Kiosk at 202-884-8093 or at skiosk@aed.org.